

The road to being your own boss has both challenges and rewards

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ADVERTORIAL WRITER

For many employees in the work force, the thought of "being your own boss" would be a dream come true.

But the myriad details in becoming an entrepreneur can seem like a nightmare if someone doesn't know where to begin or where to seek help.

The U. S. Small Business Administration's (SBA) Office of Advocacy defines a small business as one with less than 500 employees. According to the agency, small businesses make up 99.7 percent of all employer firms and have generated 60 to 80 percent of new jobs each year for the last decade.

BUSINESS RESOURCES

The SBA is an independent agency of the government that assists aspiring entrepreneurs in starting, building and growing businesses. SBA offices are located throughout the nation, with development centers providing local accessibility. The N.J. Small Business Development Centers (NJSBDC) network features 11 regional centers and additional offices in each county.

Vincent D'Elia, regional director of the Bergen SBDC at Bergen Community College, says anyone who's considering starting their own business should expect many challenges, such as obtaining start-up financing, finding employees, being in regulatory compliance and dealing

with competition. "[They] should start by doing a feasibility study to quantify their market in terms of projected revenue so they can estimate what their profit potential will be," D'Elia said.

According to D'Elia, the development centers provide clients with consulting services at no cost. "The Bergen SBDC at Bergen Community College not only offers ongoing business consultations to start-up and existing businesses but [also] provides low-cost and no-cost training in the form of educational workshops on business issues through the Division of Continuing

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Education at the college," he said.

Calling themselves "Counselors to America's Small Business," SCORE is another group that budding entrepreneurs can turn to for advice. According to its Web site, SCORE, which operates in cooperation with the SBA, has 389 offices in the U.S. with more than 10,500 working and retired business professionals who volunteer their services. They too offer counseling services at no cost, with fees ranging from \$20-\$75 for workshops and seminars.

Lisa Feury is one New Jersey entrepreneur who turned to SCORE when she created two businesses in September. Trustworthy Dog Care provides local dog-walking services in the West Milford and Jefferson area, while her pet-portrait business, Paw Prints Pet Portraits, serves all of north Jersey.

"I never liked taking orders from a boss, and I always wanted to start my own business," Feury said. "I just didn't know which business was right for me. Someone suggested dog walking to me because I love dogs and love to walk and hike. My hobby of photography also came into play, and I decided to offer pet photography to clients as well. So I quit my retail sales job of 16 years and went for it."

Feury, whose Web site is

www.trustworthydogcare.com, says operating her business has been a slow, but steady process.

"The most important advice I can give anyone wanting to start a business is have faith in yourself," she said. "Don't let anyone discourage you, not even family members. Stick with it, and eventually you will succeed."

FRANCHISE OPPORTUNITIES

Another avenue for those wanting to run their own business is to purchase a franchise, which can deliver a sense of security as well as marketing power because the business has an established brand name.

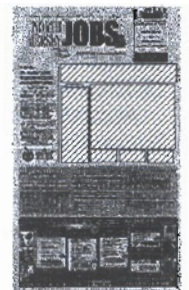
According to the International Franchise Association's (IFA) Web site, franchises provide purchasers - also known as franchisees - with training and a business model to follow.

All types of businesses lend themselves to franchises. The IFA cites more than 75 categories among its members, including eateries, maid services, travel agencies, construction, dating services, video sales, lawn-care services and more.

Curves is a fitness franchise with 10,000 locations worldwide. The first facility opened in the U.S. in 1992. Designed for women, Curves offers a 30-minute fitness routine within a supportive environment.

Becky Frusher, of corporate communications with Curves International, Inc., says Curves looks for people with passion and then teaches them how to run a business. "Passion is something you can't teach," she said.

Besides attending a mandatory week of training, Curves owners also have access to a support network, says Frusher. "During their grand opening week, Curves



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supplies a mentor to help them get off to a good start, and, on an ongoing basis, there are many other training and certification opportunities," she said. "In addition, Curves owners have a dedicated area and regional director [from] whom they can draw support, as well as the support of the entire corporate staff."

Frusher said anyone interested in purchasing a Curves franchise should visit www.buycurves.com.

Sylvan Learning, which was founded in 1979, delivers private tutoring for children in grades pre-K to 12 and has more than 1,200 centers in North America.

Aimee Martin, vice president of business development with Educate, Inc., which owns Sylvan Learning, says Sylvan seeks entrepreneurs who are enthusiastic, love kids, value learning and want to start their own business, but not from scratch.

Martin says Sylvan Learning's brand name is one way franchises succeed and attract their students. "In addition to our heavy advertising investment – approximately \$70 million annually – Sylvan offers extensive training, including an annual conference, a strong Franchise Owners Association, which provides an open and frequent forum of communication, and market-driven product introductions, which support franchisees' growth initiatives," Martin said.

Martin said potential franchisees should visit www.tutoring.sylvanlearning.com.

The after-school math and reading program Kumon, which was founded in 1958 in Japan, is another franchise, with more than 1,200 centers in the U.S.

According to Tom Kuzcek, of Kumon North America, the Kumon franchise looks for someone with excellent math, reading and communication skills, and who enjoys helping children reach their fullest potential. Franchisees must also have the needed funds to launch the franchise. "We do require the prospective

franchisees to have a four-year degree and require they have the finances available to open a franchise, which ranges from \$30,401 to \$110,290 as the initial investment," Kuzcek said.

Kuzcek also said there is always help available for franchise owners. "We offer initial training of eight days in our national training facility in Chicago, and we supply all materials reasonably necessary for the operation of a Kumon center," he said. "Our franchising department offers support and guidance based on years of experience along with site-selection assistance, rental subsidy and marketing assistance. We also supply the signage for the retail site."

Rita Daly and Millie Portscher are co-owners of a Kumon center in Montvale. Both women have run that center for nearly 16 years. They eventually purchased two other centers in Emerson and Upper Montclair.

Daly had been a teacher for 12 years, when she said Portscher approached her about purchasing a Kumon center. "My friend, Millie, she had heard on the radio about Kumon," Daly said "We were talking on the phone one day, as I was helping her son with some math homework, and she said that I should go for it and that she would help me."

Even though they received help from the Kumon corporation, Daly said there still were some challenges when they first started out, such as acquiring finances and finding a rental space. "You won't be making money for a few years, so you have to understand that, too," Daly said.

Portscher says entrepreneurs should start small and grow. "Don't chew off more than you can handle," she said.

Daly adds those looking to buy a franchise should find one suited to their interests. "I was always service-oriented, and I value education, so I knew I would go into service-type work," Daly said.

She also advises others to not

be afraid to explore options. "I think you have to find out more and get more information," she said. "It is always good to look into things you are interested in."

Kuzcek said those interested in purchasing a Kumon franchise should visit www.kumon.com.

For more information about starting your own business, visit www.sba.gov, www.score.org and www.franchise.org.

